

Message Text

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ACTION EUR-12

INFO OCT-01 ISO-00 EURE-00 CIAE-00 DODE-00 PM-04 H-01
INR-07 L-03 NSAE-00 NSC-05 PA-01 PRS-01 SP-02
SS-15 USIA-06 HEW-04 DHA-02 IO-13 /077 W
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P R 081535Z JUN 77
FM AMEMBASSY ROME
TO SECSTATE WASHDC PRIORITY 5163
INFO AMCONSUL FLORENCE
AMCONSUL GENOA
AMCONSUL MILAN
AMCONSUL NAPLES

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E.O. 11652: N/A
TAGS: PFOR, PINT, IT
SUBJECT: DC SCORES SURPRISE VICTORY IN SENATE AND BLOCKS
ABORTION BILL

SUMMARY: THE DC SCORED A SURPRISING VICTORY IN THE SENATE ON JUNE 7 WHEN ITS MOTION TO BLOCK ABORTION LEGISLATION WAS PASSED BY A NARROW MAJORITY. VOTING AGAINST THE ABORTION LAW IN THE SECRET BALLOTING WERE THE DC, THE MSI, THE CONSERVATIVE DEMOCRAZIA NAZIONALE, AND AT LEAST SEVEN DEFECTORS FROM THE LEFT, PRO-ABORTION PARTIES. THE LATTER APPEAR TO HAVE VOTED WITH THE DC AS A MATTER OF CONSCIENCE, THOUGH SOME NEWSPAPERS SUGGEST THAT THEIR VOTES MAY REPRESENT AN EFFORT TO SABOTAGE THE CURRENT NEGOTIATIONS FOR A PROGRAMMATIC ACCORD. THE DC AND PCI WERE CAUTIOUS IN THEIR COMMENTS ON THE VOTE, BUT EARLY INDICATIONS ARE THAT PSI WISHES TO MAKE ABORTION A MAJOR POLITICAL ISSUE. WHAT THE FULL IMPLICATIONS OF THE SURPRISING DC VICTORY WILL BE IS NOT YET CLEAR. END SUMMARY.

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1. THE DC SCORED AN UNEXPECTED VICTORY IN THE SENATE ON JUNE 7 WHEN ITS MOTION TO BLOCK PROPOSED ABORTION LEGISLATION PASSED BY A TWO-VOTE MARGIN, 156 TO 154. ELEVEN SENATORS WERE ABSENT FOR THE VOTE. THE LEFTIST/ LAY PRO-ABORTION FRONT HAD A MATHEMATICAL MAJORITY GOING INTO THE VOTE AND EXPECTED NO DIFFICULTIES IN DEFEATING THE DC INITIATIVE. HOWEVER, THE SECRET

SENATE BALLOT THE VOTES OF THE DC, THE MSI, RIGHTEST
DEMOCRAZIA NAZIONALE, AND AT LEAST SEVEN DEFECTORS
FROM THE LEFT/LAY PARTIES COMBINED TO GIVE THE VICTORY
TO THE ANTI-ABORTION FORCES. THOUGH MOST SOURCES FEEL
THE SEVEN DEFECTORS OPPOSED THE CURRENT PERMISSIVE ABORTION
PROPOSALS ON THE BASIS OF CONSCIENCE, SOME NEWSPAPER
COMMENTARY HAS SUGGESTED THAT THEY REPRESENT AN
EFFORT ON THE PART OF SOME LAY FORCES (READ PSI)
TO SABOTAGE THE CURRENT NEGOTIATIONS FOR A PROGRAMMATIC
ACCORD.

2. SEVERAL POSSIBILITIES EXIST FOR THE FUTURE OF
ABORTION LEGISLATION. SENATE STATUTES PROHIBIT THE
RE-INTRODUCTION OF THE ABORTION BILL FOR AT LEAST
SIX MONTHS, BUT THE REPUBLICANS HAVE STATED THEIR
INTENTION TO RE-OPEN DISCUSSION ON THE BILL IN THE
CHAMBER OF DEPUTIES, WHICH HAS ALREADY APPROVED THE
LEGISLATION, IN ANTICIPATION OF RE-SUBMITTING IT TO THE
SENATE IN DECEMBER. ANOTHER POSSIBILITY WOULD BE TO
SUBMIT THE ABORTION QUESTION TO A PUBLIC REFERENDUM.
IN 1975 THE RADICAL PARTY COLLECTED SUFFICIENT SIGNATURES
ON A PETITION FOR A REFERENDUM ON ABORTION AND PRESENTED
THE PETITION TO THE COURT OF CASSATIONS. THE COURT
APPROVED THE PETITION, BUT THE JUNE 20, 1976, PARLIA-
MENTARY ELECTIONS INTERVENED TO HALT THE PROCESS OF
PUTTING THE QUESTION TO A PUBLIC VOTE. ITALIAN LAW
PROHIBITS THE SUBMISSION OF ANY QUESTION TO PUBLIC
REFERENDUM FOR AT LEAST ONE YEAR AFTER PARLIAMENTARY
ELECTIONS AND REQUIRES THAT SUCH REFERENDUMS BE HELD BETWEEN
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APRIL 15 AND JUNE 15 THEREFORE THE EARLIEST POSSIBLE

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DATE THAT THE RADICAL INITIATIVE COULD BE PUT BEFORE THE PUBLIC WOULD BE LATE IN APRIL 1978. A THIRD POSSIBILITY, INDICATED BY A NUMBER OF DC SPOKESMEN IN THE WAKE OF THE JUNE 7 VOTE, WOULD BE THE INTRODUCTION, AFTER CONSULTATION WITH THE ABSTAINING PARTIES, OF A LESS PERMISSIVE ABORTION LAW THAT WOULD ALLOW ONLY "THERAPEUTIC" ABORTIONS. THE PCI SENATE GROUP INDICATED INTEREST IN DISCUSSING THE FORMULATION OF A LESS PERMISSIVE MEASURE WITH THE DC, AS DID SPOKESMEN FOR THE PRI, PSDI, AND PLI.

3. DC LEADERS EXPRESSED SATISFACTION WITH THE SENATE'S ACTION BUT CAREFULLY REFRAINED FROM GLOATING OVER THEIR SUCCESS, STATING THE OPINION THAT THE ABORTION QUESTION IS A MATTER OF CONSCIENCE RATHER THAN POLITICS AND SHOULD NOT BE ALLOWED TO IMPINGE ON CURRENT POLITICAL NEGOTIATIONS. THE COMMUNIST REACTION WAS EQUALLY CAUTIOUS AND MINIMIZED THE LIMITED OFFICIAL USE

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POLITICAL SIGNIFICANCE OF THE ISSUE. PCI DAILY L'UNITA, HOWEVER, MADE CLEAR THE PARTY'S STRONG SUSPICION THAT THE PSI OR SOME OTHER LAY FORCE HAD ENCOURAGED THE SEVEN DEFECTIONS FROM THE PRO-ABORTION FRONT AS A MEANS OF UPSETTING THE CURRENT DELICATE POLITICAL BALANCE. WHILE THE SMALLER LAY PARTIES ALSO APPEAR ANXIOUS TO MINIMIZE THE POLITICAL IMPACT OF THE VOTE, THE PSI ISSUED STRONG, POLEMICAL PROTESTS AND ANNOUNCED A SECRETARIAT MEETING FOR JUNE 9 TO EXAMINE THE "POLITICAL CONSEQUENCES" OF THE SENATE'S ACTION. THE FAR LEFT SEEMED TO TAKE PERVERSE PLEASURE IN THE RESULTS OF THE SENATE'S VOTE AS RADICAL DEPUTY MARCO PANELLA SEIZED THE OPPORTUNITY TO LASH PCI SECRETARY BERLINGUER FOR NOT HAVING MILITATED STRONGLY ENOUGH IN FAVOR OF ABORTION AND FOR COMPROMISING WITH THE DC, THEREBY "CONDEMNING

THE OTHER LAY FORCES TO HUMILIATION BY THE CATHOLICS".

4. COMMENT: THOUGH STUNG BY CRITICISM FROM THE FAR LEFT AND CLEARLY UNHAPPY WITH THE GENERAL ATTITUDE OF THE SOCIALISTS, THE PCI SEEMS AT PRESENT UNWILLING TO ALLOW THE RESULTS OF THE SENATE'S ABORTION VOTE TO HAMPER THE NEGOTIATIONS FOR A PROGRAMMATIC ACCORD AT A TIME WHEN ITS SHORT-TERM GOAL OF "COLLEGIAL MEETINGS" IS WITHIN REACH. HOWEVER, THE PSI APPEARS INTENT ON MAKING ABORTION A MAJOR POLITICAL ISSUE. THE RESULTS OF THE JUNE 9 PSI SECRETARIAT MEETING SHOULD PROVIDE A CLEARER INDICATION OF WHAT TACTICS THE SOCIALISTS WILL CHOOSE.

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Message Attributes

Automatic Decaptioning: X
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Channel Indicators: n/a
Current Classification: UNCLASSIFIED
Concepts: REPORTS, ABORTION, LEGISLATIVE BILLS, MEETING VOTING RECORDS
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Copy: SINGLE
Sent Date: 08-Jun-1977 12:00:00 am
Decaption Date: 01-Jan-1960 12:00:00 am
Decaption Note:
Disposition Action: RELEASED
Disposition Approved on Date:
Disposition Case Number: n/a
Disposition Comment: 25 YEAR REVIEW
Disposition Date: 22 May 2009
Disposition Event:
Disposition History: n/a
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Drafter: n/a
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